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## **Relaxation Tape 2: Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that will help you to be able to recover more quickly from stress by becoming more relaxed. It will also help you get into a relaxed state prior to any anticipated stressful situation, like making a speech. Strangely enough, this relaxation technique is unique in that, it produces relaxation by first producing tension. Specifically, once we get going, I will ask you to tense certain muscle groups, and then relax them. By tensing and then relaxing, you will actually be more relaxed than if you just tried to feel really relaxed. It's important to note, however, that these exercises should not be done in a way that causes pain. Therefore, if you feel pain when tensing, tense that muscle less or not at all; instead, just focus on relaxing it.

Since everyone has their own particular group of muscles that seem to react poorly to tension, progressive muscle relaxation will also help you identify which muscle groups are problematic for you. For some of you it may be the back of the neck or shoulders, for others it may be across the forehead, for still others it may be the forearms or legs. Once you know which muscles cause you problems, when you feel yourself becoming tense during the day, you can focus on these areas first.

So let's begin with the demonstration by getting comfortable. Sit up straight in a chair with both feet flat on the floor and place your hands by your sides or in your lap. (Make sure that your feet and hands are not crossed.) Close your eyes, if you wish, and concentrate on breathing slowly, using your diaphragm to get full, deep breaths. As we discussed in the first relaxation tape, one of the best ways to relax is to shift to diaphragmatic breathing and to breathe slowly. You should try to take a long time to inhale, and an even longer time to exhale. In fact, you should strive to gradually increase your inhalations to seven seconds and your exhalations to eight seconds. Remember: As you breathe in, your diaphragm contracts and moves down, drawing air into your lungs and pushing your belly out. This allows for deep breathing. Then, as you breath out, your diaphragm relaxes and moves upward, helping to pull your belly in. This allows for the air to be exhaled out of the lungs. At first, these intervals may seem excessively long, so do what you can. With practice, you'll get better.

Let's try, but don't force yourself.

Breathe in: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. And Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... You may already feel more relaxed.

Now try that three more times:

Inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... and blow out all of your tension and stress.

And again inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... and you are very relaxed.

And again inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... and blow out all of your tension and stress.

Now, make a fist with your right hand and clench it really hard. Feel the tension in your forearm ... hand ... and fingers. Clench it while trying to relax the rest of your body. Hold it ... and now let it go and see if, indeed, it feels more relaxed than it did before.

Now, let's try it with both hands. Clench both of your fists really hard. Feel the tension in your forearms ... hands ... and fingers. Try to relax the rest of your body as much as possible ... and now ... slowly ... relax your hands. Shake your hands out a little bit and put them down. Make sure your breathing is slow, and relax the rest of your body.

The next group of muscles we're going to work on are the biceps on the front part of the upper arms. Imagine that you are a weightlifter and you're showing off your biceps muscles, and tense both arms. Tense ... tense ... tense ... and hold it ... now relax your arms. All relaxed.

Next we are going to tense the triceps muscles in the back of the upper arms. Put your arms out in front of you and push hard like you're pushing against a wall. Push ... push ... push ... and hold it ... and now relax. Shake your arms out and then put them down by your sides.

Now we're going to work on the facial muscles. This is really fun. First, I want you to raise your eyebrows as high as you can. Get them all the way up to your hairline. Hold it ... hold it ... hold it ... and now relax. You might even feel your forehead to make sure it's all smoothed out.

Now make a frown and frown real hard. Pull your eyebrows down the other way. Frown and hold it ... hold it ... now relax. Feel your face all smooth again.

Some of us carry tension in our eyes and don't even know it. Close your eyes really hard. Does that feel familiar? Keep your face all "scrunched-up" ... hold it ... hold it ... now, easily, let it go.

Some of you may carry tension in your jaws. Maybe your dentist has even told you that you grind your teeth a lot. See if this feels familiar: Clench your jaws ... just clench your teeth together and hold it ... hold it ... hold it ... and now relax. If you'd like to see how clenching your teeth can give you a headache, put your thumb on the corner of your jaw and place your middle finger up on your temple and then clench your teeth again. Feel how that temple area pulls tight when you clench your teeth together.

Now let's move to the neck area, a common problem area for many people. Put your chin on your chest. Hold it, and feel the tension in the back of the neck ... hold it ... hold it ... and now raise your chin up again.

Maybe the most common problem area for most people is the shoulders. Raise or shrug your shoulders so they are squeezed up around your ears. Hold it ... hold it ... for many of you this will feel very familiar ... hold it ... and now relax and let it go. Relax. Let's repeat this area. Again,

shrug your shoulders up around your ears and hold it ... hold it ... and now relax. Take a few slow breaths.

Another area for tension may be in the chest. Take a deep breath and hold it tight. Feel the tension in your chest ... hold it ... hold it ... slowly exhale and feel your chest relax.

Now, let's move to the abdominal muscles. Pull the stomach muscles in like you want to reduce your waist size by several inches ... pull them in tight ... and hold it ... hold it ... and relax.

The next area is the back. If you have any kind of back problems, you probably shouldn't attempt this one. Instead, just imagine yourself doing this. Otherwise, arch your back so there is a hollow in your back ... arch your back and hold it ... hold it ... and now relax.

You can carry tension in your bottom too, so pull in the buttocks ... you'll know when you're doing it ... pull it in ... hold it tight ... and let it go and relax. Feel your whole body relax.

Now we will do the legs and feet together. Put both feet firmly on the floor and press ... press against the floor with both feet ... press it hard ... hold it ... and relax. Now put your heels down on the floor and your toes up. Push your heels down and feel the tension on your shins, on the front of your legs ... feel it? ... hold it ... and relax. Lastly, put your toes down and your heels up. You'll feel a different tension, more on your calf muscles, on the back of your legs. Hold it and feel the tension ... hold it ... now put your heels down and relax. You can shake your legs out a little and then get back in your basic position.

Now let's try to relax a little bit more by focusing briefly on each area we covered. Notice how relaxed each area is now-starting from the bottom and working upwards: feet ... relaxed; ankles ... relaxed; calves ... relaxed; knees ... relaxed; thighs ... relaxed; buttocks and lower back ... all relaxed; stomach and waist ... relaxed; chest and upper back ... all relaxed; shoulders ... relaxed; feel the sensation all down your arms ... relaxed ... forearms, hands, each of your fingers ... all relaxed. Imagine a wave of relaxation going up from your fingers to your shoulders again ... all relaxed. Relax your neck ... your jaw ... your tongue ... and cheeks ... up to the forehead and scalp ... all relaxed.

Now, I'm going to count backwards from five fairly slowly. I would like you to breathe slowly and, on the inhale, say to yourself, "I am" and, on the exhale, say to yourself, "relaxed." Five ... "I am ... relaxed" ... Four ... "I am ... relaxed." Three ... "I am ... relaxed" ... Two ... "I am ... relaxed" ... One ... "I am ... relaxed."

Now, slowly open your eyes. Take a big stretch and see how good you feel.



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